



"I will pour out my Spirit upon all...

and your young shall see visions

and your old shall dream dreams."

--Acts 2:17

Voices & Visions

A publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

Volume 2, Number 1

January/February 2000

Walk in the Spirit

The Story of Community Congregational United Church of Christ

By Bennie Liggins

In his book *The Community of the King*, Henry Snyder writes, "If Jesus actually gave more time to preparing a community of disciples than to proclaiming the good news (which he did), then the contemporary church must also recognize the importance of community for proclamation."

The "preparation of community" is the story of Community Congregational United Church of Christ in Montgomery, Alabama. On April 21, 1994, the building of First Congregational Christian Church in Montgomery was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. The majority of the members voted to rebuild on the site. Twenty-three others left and became the core of Community Congregational.

On June 2, 1996, we gathered for our inaugural worship service. The title of the sermon that day was "Mission Possible." These charter members were determined to be part of a church that is working to transform society, not by secular means but by putting on "the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11). They were convinced by the Spirit to do this, against all odds.

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Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The Ministry of Joe Ingle

By Joyce Hollyday

Joe Ingle remembers vividly the uprising at the Attica prison in New York in 1970. He was watching it unfold on his little black-and-white TV in a tenement in East Harlem, where he was spending an "urban year" during seminary. He had never been in a jail. He was surprised at the anger of the inmates he observed, but he figured that if prison conditions were as they said, they deserved to be angry.

That event prompted him to begin spending 20 hours a week at the Bronx House of Detention. "I still remember walking across that threshold for the first time," Joe says. The guards opened a door into a cellblock, then slammed it behind him. Joe remembers thinking, "O my God, I'm locked in here with these animals."

His perspective was changed radically from that experience. He discovered caring human beings behind the bars. He is now director of the Neighborhood Justice Center in Nashville, Tennessee. His ministry is devoted to upholding the humanity and dignity of people in prison—particularly those on death row—and to working for reconciliation between victims and offenders.

Joe became a close friend of John Spenkelink, who was executed on May 25, 1979, in Florida. Joe was with John's mother at a motel while her son was being strapped into the electric chair. She had fallen asleep from exhaustion and stress. Joe had to wake her and tell her that her son was dead. "Tears sprang up instantaneously in her

eyes," he says. "I tried to find words, but I didn't have any. I held her and we sobbed and prayed and thought about what else we could have done." Then Joe went into the bathroom, turned the water on full blast, pounded the walls, and screamed, "God, why is there no justice?"

(continued on page 3)



*Rev. Joe Ingle (right) visits
death row inmate Philip Workman.*



"Grace to you, and peace ..."

A Letter from the Conference Minister

Dear Friends:

As I write this letter, we are preparing to celebrate Advent and moving toward Christmas. This is the time when, in the birth of the Christ child, God's relationship with this creation was suddenly and dramatically changed. In this small child, God took human form and came to dwell among us—or, in the words of the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith, came "to share our common lot."

Time and again in history, God has intervened in sudden and unexpected ways, defying our expectations and shifting the course of events. I believe that such a change is upon us in the church of Jesus Christ, particularly our beloved denomination, the United Church of Christ. Some people refer to this as a "post-denominational era," saying that the end of the denomination is at hand. I would prefer to think of this as an era of deep and profound change.

It is true that the congregations of the United Church of Christ were in many instances established to serve needs and people different from those that surround them today. Often our churches were established to serve particular ethnic groups, allowing them to perpetuate their culture, values, and traditions in this new land. Other churches were established to serve the burgeoning suburban populations of the 1950s through 1970s. In the Southeast Conference, many congregations were established to serve alongside schools established to educate poor people, both black and white.

A shift is taking place. We are facing new populations, new needs, new cultures, and new opportunities. I believe that the Southeast Conference is at the forefront of facing these changes. We recognize that the manner in which we have trained ministers in the past is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of ministry in our congregations. We also recognize that the old manner of starting churches no longer serves to establish congregations that are likely to live into a new and vibrant future.

It has not escaped my attention that our growing congregations are those that have a clear sense of mission and identity, and are unapologetically a part of the United Church of Christ and its rich traditions and heritage. I have also found that through efforts such as our clergy retreats and the TAP Program, we are developing fellowship and times of renewal, and equipping people in new ways for vital and faithful ministries.

I believe that the Southeast Conference is beginning to undertake a challenging and exciting task of reshaping its ministries so that it can effectively meet the needs of our congregations and our ministers. As I look around me, I see congregations coming alive through the power of the possibilities that surround them. I hope you share this experience with me by being a part of the life of the Conference, inviting our Covenant for Renewal teams into your midst, and taking advantage of the training opportunities we can bring to you for more effective Christian Education and stewardship.

As surely as God came to earth to dwell among us—and so shifted the course of history—so too God continues to work through the church of Jesus Christ: to shift and shape the very course of history; to make the old new; to make the new faithful; and to offer God's redemptive and healing love to all creation. I rejoice in the possibilities that lie before us, as we enter the new millennium.

In Christ,
Timothy C. Downs

New Location for the Southeast Conference Annual Meeting

As mentioned in the last issue of *Voices & Visions*, the Southeast Conference is respecting the request of our two congregations in Charleston, South Carolina, to boycott South Carolina as a site for our Annual Meeting in 2000. The issue sparking the boycott is that South Carolina is the only state in the union to fly the battle flag of the Confederacy above its State House.

The Board of Directors of the Conference has agreed to respond affirmatively to the invitation from **Community Congregational United Church of Christ in Montgomery, Alabama**, to hold the Annual Meeting there **June 16-18, 2000**. Community Congregational UCC is extending this invitation as a gesture of support for our congregations in South Carolina. Please mark the date on your calendars and plan to be there.

CONFERENCE CALENDAR

J A N U A R Y

- 9** SAL/NWFL Association Quarterly Meeting
(New Hope Congregational, Clio, AL)
- 14 - 15** Board of Directors Meeting
(Community Congregational, Montgomery, AL)
- 15** Annual Meeting Planning Committee Meeting
(Community Congregational, Montgomery, AL)
- 17** M. L. King, Jr. Day (Conference office closed)
- 21 - 22** Rekindle the Gift Advisory Committee Meeting
(Central Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA)
- 27 - 28** Conference Staff Meeting
(Pilgrim Congregational, Chattanooga, TN)
- 28** Covenant for Renewal Team Meeting
(Pilgrim Congregational, Chattanooga, TN)

F E B R U A R Y

- 21** Presidents' Day (Conference office closed)

(continued from page 1)

The search for justice—not the vengeance our society calls “justice,” but a restorative justice that promotes the common good—has driven Joe’s work. He believes that the Bible’s perspective on the death penalty is clear: “You look at the life of Jesus, and you see a life based on—and lived out of—love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. How does the death penalty fit in with those things? It doesn’t.” Joe sees the death penalty as “an instrument of societal revenge, the polar opposite of Jesus’ ministry.”

He points out that the 23 references to the death penalty in the Old Testament include putting children to death if they talk back to their parents, and executing adulterers. “I don’t think any of us want to take that worldview,” he says. In contrast, Jesus commands us to love our enemies, to no longer live by “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” (see Matthew 5:38-48). In Jesus, we have a different model. “Here’s a man,” says Joe, “who came and offered his life on a cross. He gave himself over to execution so that no one else would have to ever again.”

For 25 years, Joe Ingle has been matching church members with people on death row. “We’re on the journey together,” he says. He encourages everyone to go visit people in prison. “You don’t have to know them—just go see them—because that’s what Jesus says to do” (see Matthew 25:31-46). Joe says that his work is difficult. But, he adds, “I have been given a whole lot more than I give.”

Voices & Visions

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FYI

Deadline for registration for the **National UCC Women's Meeting** is February 1. The meeting will be held in Charlotte, N.C., April 27-30. The theme is "From Many Streams—a New River." This promises to be an exciting event. Information is available through the Conference Office.

Interested in evangelism? **Evangelism Connections 2000** will be held March 31-April 1 in Pittsburgh; September 15-16 in Houston; and November 3-4 in St. Paul. Contact the Conference Office for more information.

The **National Youth Event 2000** will be held in Ames, Iowa, July 6-10. This is an opportunity not to be missed for youth. Registration materials are available at the Conference Office.

Mini-camp 2000 will be held at Noah's Ark, Panama City Beach, May 5-7. Teachers, cooks, adult chaperones, and people to serve on the planning committee are needed. Contact the Conference Office.

Ed Schneider, pastor of Pleasant Hill Community Church UCC, has an educational video curriculum that he is willing to lend to churches. The video series, **From Christ to Constantine: The Trial and Testimony of the Early Church**, can be used as either a six- or 12-week curriculum and includes a study guide. If you are interested, call Ed at 931-277-3193.

The Conference Office has received almost 30 of the red 1974 UCC Hymnals. They are available for the asking.

Conference Minister Timothy Downs has been sending a **weekly letter to Southeast Conference clergy** by e-mail. This regular update includes information about events and resources, as well as prayer concerns and celebrations. If you are a member of the clergy and would like to be put on the mailing list, please contact Tim Downs at the Conference Office.

Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds, a retreat center in North Carolina, has graciously extended an invitation for any clergy of the Southeast Conference to spend personal time there free of charge, as space is available. If you are interested, contact Eric Johnson at 828-295-7813; guest@ucc-brag.org.

Almost the entire staff and directorate of the UCC Office for Church in Society traveled to Fort Benning, Ga., in November to march in protest of the Army's controversial **School of the Americas**. Nineteen of the 29 OCIS members entered the base in a peaceful demonstration and were removed by military police. They were part of a larger group of about 8,000 protesters. The school has been implicated in training repressive right-wing military and police personnel in Latin America.



Pleasant Hill Community Church Work Group

*Martha Lammers
removing rug
from corners*

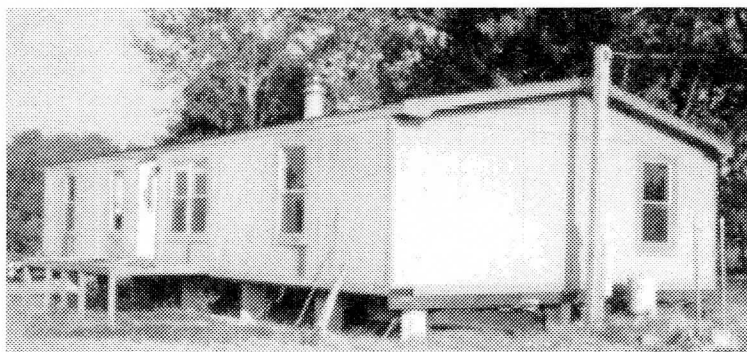


Progress on the Allen Retreat Center

The second work camp at the Allen Retreat Center took place the week of November 8, 1999. A committed band of pilgrims from Pleasant Hill worked to secure the trailer there as an office building. Considerable cleaning and repair have taken place to make it a useable facility.

But perhaps the most important part of these work camps has been the opportunity for area congregations to extend hospitality to those who care enough to come and work to make the Allen Retreat Center more than a dream. Each evening the work crew of between 10 and 12 people was welcomed into another one of the nearby churches, where they were fed and entertained and shared an opportunity to tell stories to one another. Ms. Lala Allen was so pleased with the work of the crews that she gave each one a large bag of pecans as a gesture of thanks.

Our fund-raising efforts continue. We have \$14,000 available for the next phase of the work on the retreat center. We are grateful for all of those who worked so hard at the Oak Grove Country Fair, and to Erna Bryant, who continues to solicit gifts and contributions from area congregations. We also give thanks for the former Conference Ministers who served the Southeast Conference over recent years, who have banded together to contribute \$3,000 so far, as a gesture of appreciation to Ms. Lala Allen for her years of service to the Conference.



Retreat Center Office/Dorm



Will Rabert laying plastic as moisture seal

*Charlie Lord replacing
pipes in crawl space*



ANNUAL MEETINGS OF

Georgia/South Carolina Association



Paul Sadler delivers the keynote.

The Annual Meeting of the Georgia/South Carolina Association was held September 10-11, 1999, at First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Atlanta, Ga. The hospitality of First Congregational Church was warm and welcoming. The food prepared by Betty Thomas was Southern cooking at its best.

The Rev. Dr. Paul Sadler, Minister for Evangelism for African-American and Native American Indian Church Development of the Board for Homeland Ministries, was our keynoter. Dr. Sadler urged us to embrace new models of church life and encouraged us to be open to the winds of the Spirit as we seek to live creatively and energetically into a new day.

Officers were elected, and we are pleased to announce that they are: Annette Nielsen, Moderator; Elizabeth Clement, Vice Moderator; Lisa Alston, Secretary; and Jimmy Loyless, Treasurer. Committee Chairs are: Myrtle Johnson, Christian Education; Larry Calbert, pro tem Church and Ministry; David Menchhofer, Church Development and Evangelism; Jean Thomas, Social Justice; Virginia Ferrell, Stewardship and OCWM; Erna Bryant, Women In Church and Society; Jimmy Fields, Annual Awards; Annette Nielsen, Nominating Committee.

Alabama/Tennessee Association

*Dick Sales and Bennie Liggins
(Associate Conference Ministers)
accept a Conference support check from
Bill Chew (past Moderator) and Milton Hurst (Moderator).*



Pleasant Hill Community Church in Pleasant Hill, Tenn., was the site of the Alabama/Tennessee Association Annual Meeting September 17-18. The theme of the meeting was "We Are the Church Together."

Pastor Vant Hardaway led the opening devotion on Friday, and Dr. William Chew chaired the meeting as outgoing Moderator. Special thanks were given to the Chair of the Church and Ministry Committee, Ms. Marion Rogers. Rev. Ed Schneider, Treasurer, presented the Budget for the year 2000 of \$15,000, and it was approved.

All present were asked to complete a survey soliciting ideas regarding the Association's mission. These ideas will be used to build on thoughts generated by the July 31, 1999, leadership retreat that was held in Huntsville. The night closed with an excellent slide-and-script presentation by Rev. Erston Butterfield.

On Saturday morning, after an opening worship led by Jan Landia and illustrated with her puppets, Jan and Karl Whiteman presented a program on their three years among the people of the Marshall Islands. New Association leaders were installed: Milton Hurst, Moderator; Beatrice Forniss, Vice Moderator; John Mingus, Secretary; and Ed Schneider, Treasurer. Committee Chairpersons are: Ginny Nixon, Christian Education; Rodney Franklin, Church Development and Evangelism; Marian Rogers, Church and Ministry; Callie Stone, Social Justice; and Naomi Faust, Women in Church and Society. Communion was served by Revs. Bennie Liggins and Richard Sales, Associate Conference Ministers.

YOUR ASSOCIATIONS

South Alabama/Northwest Florida Association

The congregations of the South Alabama/Northwest Florida Association gathered for their Annual Meeting on October 2 at Antioch Congregational Church in Andalusia, Alabama. The gathering was an opportunity to celebrate the wonderful progress being made on the addition being built at the church. We ate in the as-yet-unfinished, new hall of the church, and were warmly welcomed by the pastor, Aulton Easley, who encouraged us to greater involvement in the life of the Association and the Conference.

The Association welcomed Karl and Jan Whiteman, our missionaries in Micronesia, who inspired us with stories of their ministry and mission. The following were elected as officers of the Association: Robert Foreman, Moderator; Joseph Brown, Vice Moderator; and Beth Foreman, Secretary/Treasurer. Committee Chairs are: Wanda Clark, Christian Education; Jim Courtney, Church Development and Evangelism; Marvin Brand, Church and Ministry; Jeannie Gibson, Social Justice; Woody Clark, Stewardship and OCWM; and Virada Brand, Women In Church and Society.



Jan and Karl Whiteman share their stories.

East Alabama/West Georgia Association

The East Alabama/West Georgia Association held its Annual Meeting on October 16 at Pleasant Grove Congregational Christian Church in LaFayette, Alabama. After transacting its business, the Association welcomed Mr. Rip Hardman and Rev. Timothy C. Downs to give an account of their experience as delegates at General Synod XXII in Providence, R.I. They reported at length on the wonderful fellowship of the occasion, the tremendous gifts of the Southeast Conference as they were evident at the General Synod, and the excitement that was felt over the restructuring of the denomination and the election of its new officers.

The women of Pleasant Grove served a wonderful meal, and we rejoiced in another successful and faithful year of ministry in East Alabama/West Georgia. The following were elected as officers of the Association: Arthur Dailey, Moderator; Louise Cox, Vice Moderator; Betty Moon, Secretary; and Don Harmon, Treasurer. Committee Chairpersons are: Rip Hardman, Christian Education and Youth Ministries; Wayde Washburn, Church Development and Evangelism; Roy Bain, Church and Ministry; Floyd Carmack, Social Justice; Don Harmon, Stewardship and OCWM; and Lena Dollar, Women In Church and Society.



A joyful noise is made in Alabama.



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Rev. Andrew Young was installed as the 20th president of the National Council of Churches at its General Assembly in Cleveland, Ohio, on November 11. Please keep Rev. Young in your prayers as he undergoes treatment for prostate cancer.

Odessa Woolfolk, a member of First Congregational Christian UCC in Birmingham was recently honored for her lifetime commitment to justice, with the naming of a gallery in the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute after her.

Rev. David Speno was ordained into Christian ministry at Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, on November 14.

Rev. Dr. Dwight Andrews was installed as Senior Pastor of First Congregational Church, UCC, Atlanta, on November 21.

Congratulations to **Rev. Angie Wright**, who wrote a column in a recent edition of the *United Church News*.

Rev. Dick Sales and a delegation from Pleasant Hill represented the Southeast Conference and the United Church of Christ at the dedication of our most recently rebuilt burned church, Avenue "M" Church of God in Christ, Birmingham.

Rev. Mary Brueggemann sends greetings from England, where she and **Walter** are having a wonderful sabbatical.

*Please hold in your prayers the following members of our Conference who are battling illness:

Pastor Dennis Lott, who suffers from ongoing back pain and has had several surgeries

Rev. David Menchhofer, who had a heart catheterization

Betty Lloyd, who is recovering from a serious car accident

Rev. Ted Braun, who had eye surgery

Rev. Dorothy Gager and her son **Moses**, who is being treated for a nonmalignant tumor

Rev. Paul Moore, who has suffered a number of strokes

*And pray for those who mourn these loved ones:

Rev. Lee Gable, a member of Pleasant Hill Community Church UCC, who served Lancaster Seminary for many years as a professor and Dean of the Faculty

Rev. Harry Manon, also of Pleasant Hill, who ministered in Pennsylvania

*Please offer special prayers for **Rev. Roy Bain** and his family. Roy's mother died in November, and his wife, **Wanda**, has recently had heart surgery. Also, please remember **Rev. John Sumner**, who also lost his mother recently and has a brother battling cancer. We lift up **Rev. Lewis Tait**, who lost a cousin who was a friend and mentor in ministry.

*Clergy of the Southeast Conference,
Circle Your Calendars
For the Clergy Retreat May 9-10, 2000*

We are pleased to report that the clergy retreat, keynoting the Rev. Dr. David Greenhaw, president of Eden Theological Seminary, has been moved from its initial date in October to **May 9-10, 2000**. We will gather for lunch at 12:00 noon on Tuesday, May 9, and adjourn at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 10. The retreat will take place at **Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ in Chattanooga, Tennessee**. Accommodations will be in the Chattanooga Choo Choo. Registration information will be arriving in the mail soon.

We are eager for a good turnout at this retreat. The topic will be, "Do We Have a Church There? The Future of the Local Church in the United Church of Christ." It will be a time to reflect upon the future of the United Church of Christ, its congregations, and its ministries. We will have opportunity for dialogue and discussion throughout the event.

The odds were tremendous. We had no budget, no building, and no staff. But we did have a vision—a vision that was shaped by our “walk in the Spirit.” On more than one occasion, we’ve had to remember Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.”

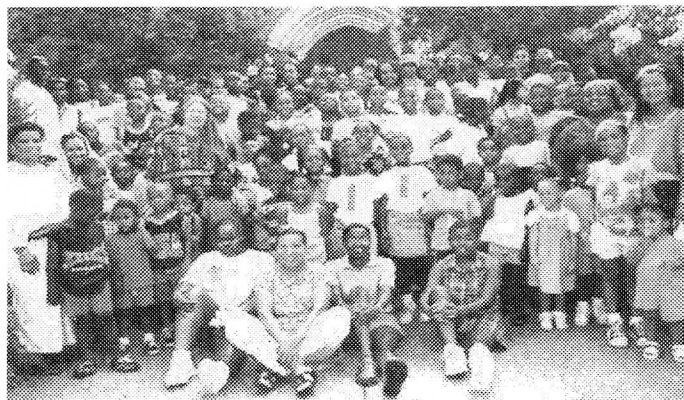
Our vision gave life to the church’s mission statement: *To develop, build, and nurture strong families through Christian worship, evangelism, education, human rights, and community outreach.* This statement of mission was our cornerstone.

My daughter recently wrote in an academic paper that the main ingredient for all successful projects or people is a “passion.” The one thing that the charter members of Community Congregational Church shared was a passion for the tenets of our mission statement. It was that passion that drove us down the road to worship, evangelism, and outreach.

Before we could go about working in the community, we had to have a home. We found that home in the most unlikely of places. There was a church on the market that seemed all wrong for us. The initial price was far more than a congregation of 23 could afford. The sanctuary had a seating capacity of 550, with an education building that housed more than 20 classrooms; 37,000 square feet in all—far more than a congregation of 23 needed. In addition, at the entrance to the building were two very large plaques. The first one stated that this was the church where former governor George Wallace held his membership; the second read that this is where his wife, Lurleen Wallace, had been funeralized.

The church was too big, too expensive, and the church home of the man who had stood in the doorway to prevent our children from attending public schools. The vote of the congregation was a resounding “yes.” We bought the building and moved in.

Our decision was based on the fact that we were not buying the church as guardians of the past but rather as leaders of the future. On August 18, 1996, we petitioned the United Church of Christ for membership into the Alabama/Tennessee Association of the Southeast Conference. Our petition was granted on September 7, 1996.



The many faces of Community Congregational Church.

Our vision included not just a congregation of 23, but a larger community determined to claim our neighborhood, our city, and our state in the name of Jesus. With that faith, we moved forward.

Shortly after moving in, we established a relationship with Bellingrath Junior High School, which is located across the street. Out of this exchange came a tutorial program, which meets the needs of children Mondays through Thursdays during the school year in the education building. One of our deacons started a Karate class/Bible study ministry, which has been very successful with the younger children. We operate a Clothes Closet, which serves more than 85 families from all over the city. This has complemented our outreach to women in prison by financing and supporting Aid to Inmate Mothers (AIM).

All of this has occurred in a worship environment that has grown to a congregation of more than 200 members. Against all odds, we have persevered. Through the grace of God, we will go even farther.

Sometimes that perseverance has come at a price. I became painfully aware of the challenge of the call on October 18, 1999. That was the day that our church secretary discovered that the church had been vandalized. Persons unknown had broken in, pulled everything out in the kitchen, poured liquid over counter tops and floor, turned over all the tables and chairs in the fellowship hall, and sprayed fire extinguishers throughout the church. The library, pastor’s and secretary’s offices were littered with broken glass, files, crumpled papers, and destroyed stationery.

I had a giraffe collection that had taken more than 20 years to accumulate through my travels and as gifts; many of these pieces were destroyed. The pastoral and choir robes were covered with dirt. The sanctuary was sprayed, altar candles were broken, and the drapes that provided a backdrop for the cross were torn down and ripped.

It was enough to make me want to give up. But as I sat in my office close to tears, contemplating my next move, my son came and placed his hand on my shoulder. He said simply, “This is why we are here. This is why we are here and the previous congregation is not. By moving out, they stated that they could not handle this. By our moving in, we showed that we could.” My son got it right.

Our story is not unique. It is a story told in the pages of the scriptures over and over again. It is the story of the Israelites struggling to escape the oppression of Pharaoh. It is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to worship the king. It is the story of the widow giving all that she had.

And it is the story of the United Church of Christ. We know that all of you have been a part of the journey. And we pray that God will continue to give you the desire to keep us in your prayers.

"Sisters, Doing What We Have the Power to Do"

A Report on the Southern Women's Conference

By Joyce Baur

"Even if nothing else had taken place, this evening's program alone has made this conference worth the trip!" Her eyes glowing, this delegate to the 11th biennial Southern Women's Conference seemed to speak for her 200 sister conferees on that mid-October Saturday night in Mississippi. The program had indeed been a profoundly moving experience. The first-person stories of four very different women, each of whom had found the support and guidance needed at crisis times in their lives at the Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi, touched each listener.

Although perhaps the most moving, Saturday evening's program was just one part of a full weekend of exceptional experiences. Following the theme "Sisters, Doing What We have the Power to Do," the two-day gathering October 15-17 offered worship services, workshops, Bible study, informal fellowship, special programs, tours, and recreation—all against the backdrop of the beautiful Gulf Shore at Pass Christian, Mississippi.

Coming from the four Southern conferences of the United Church of Christ, the women had traveled by car, bus, van, and plane from as far away as Florida and North Carolina in the east, Tennessee to the north, and Texas in the west. They represented both the vital diversity, and the harmony within that diversity, which is the joy of our church. Debra Joseph was general chair of the event, with the close assistance of Southern Conference Chair Susan Rabb-Williams and a committee composed of representatives from each of the participating conferences.

The keynote speaker, Dr. Marilyn Stavenger, Professor of Field Education and the Practice of Ministry at Eden Theological Seminary, addressed the group each day. With the skill and

knowledge born of long experience and study, Dr. Stavenger spoke twice to the theme of the conference, using 2 Timothy 1:7 as the basis of her study: "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." Her Sunday morning sermon focused on the power of disciplined servanthood.

The theme of empowerment—through worship, faith, witness, and growing together—was repeated and underscored in the workshops on Saturday. Certainly to be recalled with awe and admiration will be the marathon quilting workshop, led by Cecelia Pedescleaux. Sewing into the wee hours of Sunday morning on a pattern that united African origins and Western roots, earnest workers produced a quilt in less than 24 hours!

Walking a labyrinth as a spiritual exercise was a first for many who participated in the workshop on modes of meditation. Diana Reed Jackson's workshop on sharing power with our sisters of other faiths focused on the growing multiplicity of faith groups in our country and ways to reach out to them.

Highlighting the diversity that exists in the United Church of Christ was the lively folk-dance presentation by the young people of Evangel UCC in Stafford, Texas. This very young congregation, composed of eight Filipino families, keeps its youth close to home with its active dance program. The dexterity and precision of their Saturday night performance won enthusiastic applause and sighs of pleasure.

Old friends and new said their goodbyes after the Sunday noon meal, heading home with good memories and—one hopes—a deeper sense of empowerment. The conference in 2001 will again be hosted by the South Central Conference.



Victoria Ramaribana of Botswana, who is studying sign language in the U.S. and attending Church of the Savior in Knoxville, Tenn., and Joyce Myers-Brown of Atlanta rode the Southeast Conference bus.

Southeast Feast

Food for the Heart and Soul

By Joyce Hollyday



Tom Mozley is a chaplain at the Veterans Hospital in Atlanta. He facilitates group meetings with men who suffer from a multitude of problems, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. "I wouldn't take your job for a million bucks," a patient told him recently. "You're hanging out with a bunch of guys going nowhere."

Tom shared this comment with those of us gathered at Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta for the Specialized Ministers Retreat in mid-November. Then he added, "Sometimes it's important just to go nowhere with them."

The group that came together for the retreat that weekend included chaplains, teachers, and activists: people who minister every day to individuals who are homeless, imprisoned, hospitalized, lost, searching, or in deep grief. They are ministers who rarely see dramatic turnarounds in the lives of those whom they serve. Tom reminded us all that sometimes the best gift we can offer is simply the gift of our presence. These specialized ministers are people who know that, although they can't relieve all the suffering, they can make sure that no one suffers alone.

As I write this, we are on the verge of entering a new year and a new millennium. I confess that I have failed to get swept up in the excitement. It seems to me that life in the year 2000 is going to look pretty much the way it looked in 1999. People the world over will continue to face grief, endure suffering, and long for justice.

Adrian Boone of the Jubilee Community Center in Montgomery, Alabama, reminded us on the retreat that we are called as Christians "to live between the brokenness and God's vision." I give thanks for the weekend I spent with these specialized (and special) ministers, who carry God's vision into places of despair and hurt. I invite all of us in the Southeast Conference to remember these ministers in our prayers as we enter 2000.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

October 30, 1999; Atlanta, Georgia

Report of the Treasurer

In the first eight months of 1999, we have shown \$121,000 in OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) receipts, compared to \$98,976 for the same period in 1998. This shows an increase of just over \$22,000.

Election of a New Treasurer

The Executive Committee of the Board recommended that Brad Pruitt of Pilgrimage UCC in Marietta, Ga., be elected as Treasurer of the Southeast Conference. A motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously.

Report of the Personnel Committee

The resignation letter of Elizabeth Clement from her position as Co-Director of Rekindle the Gift was read. The Board noted that we deeply valued Elizabeth's gifts and the time she devoted to us.

Vanessa Robbs, Chair of the Personnel Committee, noted that each of the staff—Tim Downs, Joyce Hollyday, Bennie Liggins, Gerri Ryons-Hudson, and Dick Sales—received positive evaluations.

Report of the Disaster Relief Program

Tim Downs reported that Anne Ariail has indicated that she will resign as Disaster Relief Coordinator of the Southeast Conference effective December 31. He announced with gratitude that Will Rabert of Pleasant Hill has agreed to assume the duties of Disaster Relief Coordinator.

Books for Cuba

The Board authorized sending \$700 to Cuba for the purchase of seminary books.

*"I am the Lord,
I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness....
See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
Before they spring forth,
I tell you of them."
Sing to the Lord a new song,
God's praise from the end of the earth!*

—Isaiah 42:6-10

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